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## England Calls For Leadership Changes In ADOC, Pardons & Paroles

State Rep. Chris England, a Democrat from Tuscaloosa, took to social media over the weekend call for sweeping leadership changes.



Ryan Phillips, Patch Staff

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State Rep. Chris England, a Democrat from Tuscaloosa. (Photo courtesy of Rep. Chris England)

**TUSCALOOSA, AL** — In the wake of at least 10 deaths in Alabama prisons over the last month, one local state representative is advocating for sweeping changes in leadership with the Alabama Department of Corrections (ADOC) and the Alabama Bureau of Pardons & Paroles.

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State Rep. Chris England, a Democrat from Tuscaloosa who also chairs the state Democratic Party, has been an outspoken proponent for criminal justice reform throughout his career and over the weekend set his sights first on ADOC Commissioner Jeff Dunn. He then insisted that while poor management is to blame for the recent deaths, ADOC officials also routinely sweep information under the rug and away from the public eye.

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**Chris England** ✓  
@RepEngland70

Replying to @RepEngland70

Under Dunn, mismanagement, lack of transparency, violence, corruption and death happen so often that it is has become normalized. For a system that the DOJ believes is worst than the death penalty, his continued employment is direct evidence that Alabama just doesn't care.

12:39 PM · Jul 25, 2021 · Twitter for iPhone

"There just doesn't seem to be a sense of urgency to address the immediate crisis that's going on in our prison system and I think that's because there is a flat out lack of leadership in the Department of Corrections," England told Patch on Monday. "And they are so focused on building those prisons that they are basically overlooking the current humanitarian crisis going on in their facilities. At its core, hopefully getting some new leadership in place will create some momentum, new vision and direction so we can actually start addressing the immediate and urgent crisis going on right now."

England pointed to Gov. Kay Ivey's recent push to lease and build three new men's prisons, as Republicans argue that more modern facilities could provide the remedy for existing problems. However, squalid and violent conditions have drawn the attention of the U.S. Department of Justice, which has sued the state for violating the constitutional rights of its inmates.

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Dunn was appointed ADOC commissioner in 2015, and managing an annual budget exceeding \$500 million for violence inside state prison walls, along with ADOC's bi recently from England.



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Disi

on of more than 25,000 offenders, along with  
 ; time as commissioner, a wave of controversial  
 , have prompted calls for Dunn's resignation — most

"For most, when they get some information that reflects there are people in immediate danger, such as in a prison setting where you can't socially-distance, you would expect that person to respond accordingly because there is a basic level of respect for humanity, right?" England said. "But for the current commissioner to not do mass testing in the facilities or for Jeff Dunn to not use medical parole to get the most reasonably vulnerable incarcerated person out and for the Bureau of Pardons and Parole to stop hearings, that's the exact opposite you would expect someone to do if they have any respect for humanity."

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Alabama Political Reporter's Eddie Burkhalter wrote over the weekend that of the 10 state inmates who have died in the last month, as many as four prisoners have died at the Bibb Correctional Facility since July 4, likely from drug overdoses.

England then turned his focus to Leigh Gwathney, who chairs the board for the Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles. He also referred to Gwathney as being "as much of a problem as Jeff Dunn," before pointing out the only way she could be removed from office would be by impeachment.



**Chris England** ✓  
 @RepEngland70

Replying to @RepEngland70

**You know what else new prisons won't fix? Our broken pardons and paroles system. Leigh Gwathney, the chair of the board, is just as much of a problem as Jeff Dunn is. Unfortunately the only way to relieve her of duty is through impeachment. For this system to work she must go.**

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"[Impeachment] is a long shot admittedly," England said, acknowledging the conservative supermajority in the statehouse that would likely stand in the way of articles of impeachment moving forward against a Republican appointee. "But just looking at how that board is operating under her leadership makes a compelling case for her removal. We have plans to discuss it, but at the same time, we would certainly enjoy more efficient and effective operations from the board under her leadership."

Gov. Kay Ivey appointed Gwathney — a former state prosecutor — to serve as the chair of the Board of Pardons and Paroles in October 2019.

While overcrowding and violence are problems the public can readily see and understand, England explained that when forced to have hearings again

following a hiatus prompted by the coronavirus pandemic, checking in with a parole officer.



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many applicants on technical violations, such as not

What's more, England also said parole applicants have only to be denied release.

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used, with many doing everything that's asked of them,

But with partisan rancor consuming an already divided statehouse, England lamented the possibility of change coming organically from state lawmakers with respect to corrections and criminal justice reform.

"This issue itself shouldn't be a partisan issue, but it always becomes that," he said. "Just for the sake of ease of discussion, many people like to marginalize issues by making them partisan, but this isn't one of them ... all the pressure from the federal government is being met with that special form of Alabama inertia, where you have to basically sue us to make us act."

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